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Florida House Passes Bill To Bring Children Forever Families

Tallahassee, Fla.—The Florida House of Representatives today passed CS/HB 7013 relating to adoptions and foster care. The bill creates a program to advance the permanency, stability, and well-being of children in the child welfare system.

“Promoting adoptions is one of the most meaningful ways we can strengthen families and provide our most vulnerable children with loving homes,” said House Speaker Steve Crisafulli (R-Merritt Island). “Chair Brodeur’s hard work today has made it easier to find loving homes for hundreds of children in foster care.”

“As part of Work Plan 2015, we have made it a priority this session to encourage adoptions in Florida,” said Rep. Jason Brodeur (R-Sanford), Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee and sponsor of the bill. “By increasing the number and quality of adoptions in our state, this bill will help provide stability to and ensure the well-being of children in our child welfare system.”

The bill creates a program to advance the permanency, stability, and well-being of children in the child welfare system by awarding incentive payments to community-based care lead agencies (CBC’s) for achieving specified adoption performance standards. CBC’s provide adoption-related services in the state pursuant to contracts with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The new adoption incentive program would require DCF to conduct a baseline assessment of CBC adoption performance regarding such factors as the length of time children have been waiting for adoption; the length of time to complete an adoption; and feedback from prospective adoptive families, adoptive families, adoptees, children within the child welfare system, and stakeholders. The bill requires DCF to then establish measurable outcome targets for performance by each CBC and negotiate incentive payments to be paid to CBC’s upon meeting these targets.

The bill also re-creates a program to provide an additional adoption benefit of either \$5,000 or \$10,000, depending on whether the adopted child has special needs described in statute, for qualifying employees of state agencies who adopt a child from the child welfare system. The

benefit would be available for adoptions finalized on or after July 1, 2015. The program was originally created in 2000 and provided employee adoption benefits until it was repealed in 2010.

Currently the Office of Adoption and Child Protection (Office) in the Executive Office of the Governor works to promote adoption, support of adoptive families, and advance child abuse prevention through a variety of means, including participating in events to recognize and celebrate adoptive families and adopted children. The bill requires the Governor to select and recognize one or more individuals, families, or entities that have made significant contributions to the adoption of children from foster care each year. Recognition awards will be collected by the Office's direct support organization, authorized by current law.

The bill also requires DCF to prioritize educational stability for foster children and include homeschooling as one of several educational options.

The bill requires child-placing agencies conducting intercountry adoption to maintain certain records and comply with federal requirements regarding the Hague Convention, an international agreement to establish safeguards to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child.

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